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ABSTRACT

A discussion of spelling instruction for learners of English as a second language (ESL) looks at writing systems, the literature of ESL instruction, and the literature of English language arts in general. It begins with a typology of writing systems, examining how they represent both grammatical and phonological features. The nature of English orthography is then explored, focusing on its evolution, the influence of morphology on it, and its regular and irregular features. Literature on the pedagogy of spelling is then reviewed, drawing from that of the language arts in general and of ESL instruction in particular. A number of recommendations for classroom spelling instruction are presented, including those concerning the role of reading, exploration of hidden structure in the English writing system, and degree of emphasis on spelling in language instruction. (Contains 25 references, some annotated.) (MSE)

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The University of San Francisco

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Spelling Instruction in ESL:

English Orthography and Resources for Spelling Instruction in English as a Second Language

A Field Project
submitted to Dr. Dorothy Messerschmitt
of the School of Education, Univ. of San Francisco
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language

by
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June 30, 1996

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Abstract

This paper explores spelling instruction in ESL by examining the TESL literature, general English language arts literature, and through a brief look at writing systems in general and English orthography in particular. The exploration branches out in this way, because there is no one "right way" to teach spelling. An eclectic whole language approach is recommended.

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Introduction

The extent that we can teach the spelling system is limited by our understanding of English orthography. The teacher who views our orthography as irregular will teach it as such, each word individually, perhaps adding a few partial spelling rules along the way. However, there is much system in the spelling of English words. This systematism, if understood by the teacher, can be introduced to students as they learn to read and write new words.

The roles of phonetics, morphology, and etymology are all important parts of orthography. They enrich English orthography, which in the words of Chomsky and Halle, 1968, "comes remarkably close to being an optimal orthographic system for English." (p. 49)

Understanding why words are spelled the way they are will both (a) help those students who have difficulty remembering arbitrary things bring system into their spelling, and also (b) help all students tackle new words through knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, root words, morphology, phonology, homophones and homographs.

Linguistics of Spelling

Writing Systems

To appreciate what is involved in our writing system, a brief **comparative look at other writing systems** is helpful. Looking beyond alphabetic systems, to syllabic, pictographic, ideographic, and logographic systems of writing illuminates graphic characteristics inherent to writing, some of which are hidden by the phonetic tradition of our own writing system. Examining other writing systems we will see beyond the purely phonic-transcription value of our alphabetic writing systems, and see the graphic value of morphemic, syllabic, and lexical elements. These are the elements which it is the purpose of each written word to communicate. However, the alphabetic premiss of English orthography obscures the presence of these elements. If not recognized for their value, these compromises to the phonic structure can seem like frustrating irregularities.

Chomsky & Halle, 1968, have noted that English orthography, though seemingly irregular phonetically, may well be an ideal system for graphically representing the full value of our language. English alphabetic orthography has been shaped over the ages to grasp and communicate graphically lexical information that would have been lost in pure phonetic transcription.

Typology of Writing Systems

The writing system conventions of some languages are very different from ours. Simpson, 1994, looks at the different conventions of writing in a three level taxonomy: the innermost level being ***Orthography*** , which is encompassed by

Script , which is encompassed by ***Writing System*** , the outermost level. For example, at the innermost level, English and French have different orthographies but use the same script; at the script level, English and Russian have different scripts but use the same "alphabetic" writing system; and at the outermost level, Chinese and English have different writing systems ("logographic" and "alphabetic" respectively) but share the graphic medium.

Type of system

Writing can represent grammatical and phonological criteria, and usually represents some of both. **Grammatical criteria** are sentence, clause, phrase, word, and morph. **Phonological criteria** are syllable, segment (or phone), and feature of segment. One way to identify types of writing systems is to look at what type of criteria its graphic symbols represent. If the individual symbols represent whole words, the writing system is **"logographic."** If they represent morphemes, the writing system is **"morphemic"**. If single units represent syllables, segments, or features, the writing systems are **"syllabic," "segmental,"** and **"featural"** respectively. (Simpson, 1994)

However, language has all these criteria. So although a given writing system by type explicitly emphasizes one criteria, most writing systems have evolved to implicitly represent several of these criteria. Consider these examples:

1. Chinese is primarily a logographic writing system, but it also contains some phonic indicators at the syllabic level, and some morphemic indicators as well.

2. Korean is primarily a segmental (phonemic) writing system, but its graphic marks are lumped into syllabic units, which are separated by spaces at word boundaries.

3. Japanese uses primarily a syllabic script, but also uses many logograms adapted from Chinese.

English

The insight to be gained here is that English, although it uses primarily a segmental (phonemic) writing system, also represents morphemes, and perhaps other grammatical and phonemic criteria as well, at less explicit levels. Just because we write with an alphabet, does not mean all we are writing is phonemes.

English Orthography

Although through alphabetic writing we have been able to aid literacy by imitating the sounds of our spoken language in a semi-phonetic transcription, that has never made writing purely a phonetic transcription of oral language. The fact that it is a graphic medium has had significant influence on its evolution and use (Ong, 1982).

While the English writing system is alphabetic and there is much phonetic information encoded in it, its graphic form has elements which are not directly connected to phonetic transcription. That is why our orthography has resisted the efforts of spelling reformers who would have reduced it to pure phonetic transcription. For example, experienced readers recognize most written words graphically, not phonetically. The experienced reader looks at and recognizes whole words, not each individual letter. Thus "irregular" spellings which gives whole words recognizable uniqueness are valued over spellings which would be more phonetic.

This compromise of phonetic regularity to graphic uniqueness has caused considerable complexity in the English writing system, to the extent that many

people have come to view it as entirely irregular. However, in depth studies have shown that, although complicated, English orthography, when viewed in its full complexity is for the most part a regular system. (Hanna, Hanna, Hodges, & Rudorf, 1966)

Evolution of English Orthographic Structure

Early Greek, from which the English alphabet was adopted, was originally written without punctuation and without spaces between words:

EARLYGREEKWASWRITTENLIKE
THISWITHNOPUNTUATIONNOR
EVENSPACESBETWEENWORDS

Also, it vacillated between being written from left to right, and right to left. In rare instances is was even written **boustrophedon** (alternating from right to left and then left to right in serpentine down the page like an ox plowing a field, thus eliminating the need to visually backtrack to the beginning of each new line). Also, the directionality of the letters was reversed to conform to the directionality of the writing. (Balmuth, 1982)

Differentiation between uppercase and lowercase letters, punctuation, and spaces between words and between paragraphs are obvious elements of our modern orthography which we take for granted. There are other less obvious elements however which are important structural elements of our spelling, such as morpheme and syllable.

Our orthography is primarily alphabetic. Morphemic and syllabic values are therefor theoretically encoded into phonetic values as in speech. But because writing is a graphic medium, not a sound medium, some morphemic and syllabic

values can and do emerged in our writing system despite the fact that they would not belong in a pure phonetic transcription.

Our alphabet is not a perfect phonetic transcription method, it is however a highly effective method of writing English (Chomsky & Halle, 1968, p. 49). A careful look at etymologies in the dictionary shows the semantic value of syllables. That value is often lost in homophonous spoken syllables, but is retained in graphic syllables. Consider the sometimes homophonous syllable pair <ideo-> and <idio->: <ideo-> means idea, as in *ideological*, while <idio-> means proper to one, or peculiar, as in *idiosyncratic*. More familiar is the homophonous pair <dear> and <deer>. In short, our orthography compromises phonetic fidelity for the sake of semantic value.

Language Hidden in the Writing

The morpheme is the basic semantic unit of language. So although the morphemic criteria is graphically overshadowed by the segmental (phonetic) symbols we write English in, the morpheme does exert considerable influence on our orthography. Some of the ways morphemes influence our orthography are as follows:

1. Adding consistently spelled affixes to consistently spelled root words regardless of the pronunciation variations (e.g., past tense <-ed> for its allophones /d/, /id/, or /t/; and plural <-s> for its allophones /s/ or /z/).

2. Orthographic individuation of **homophones**:

dear	deer
there	their
our	hour
here	hear

3. **Homographs** for retention of lexical value,

read read (past tens)

The graphic purpose is visual clarity. So the compromise in phonetic transcription is warranted; alphabetic writing is graphic first, and phonetic second.

History Hidden in the Writing

Writing changes much slower over space and time than does spoken language. This is because speech is by nature ephemeral, it is confined to the place and the moment. Graphic media however can travel far, both geographically and temporally. Thus as individual writings retain their form much longer than individual acts of speech, so also writing conventions retain their form much longer than pronunciation conventions.

Loan words that have come to English from other languages often retained much of their original spelling. Even though their pronunciation changes over time to fit English phonology, interesting **etymological** information is preserved in the orthography.

Other **natural language change** includes the retention of residual letters which are no longer pronounced, such as <k> in knight.

The **Great Vowel Shift** was a change in the pronunciation of the English language which took place between the time of Chaucer (1340?-1400) and Shakespeare (1564-1616). The seven cardinal vowels of English all moved up a bit in their points of articulation. However, the spelling of English words did not change to match the pronunciation change. So the phoneme-grapheme correspondence of the vowels in the alphabet became different in English than it is in other Indo-European languages. "Compare, for example, the pronunciation

of the vowels *a, e, i, o, u* in Spanish, French, or German." (Robinett, 1978, p. 67). As mentioned above spoken language changes much faster than written language.

The Regular/Irregular Dispute

The Irregular View. The English spelling system is complex. The simplistic yet traditional view of our orthography as purely a system of phonetic transcription is an incomplete view. That incomplete view is riddled with the frustration of trying to see only phonetic transcription in our orthography when in fact we are looking at much more.

The Regular View. Our orthography is much more than pure phonetic transcription. When seen in its full complexity, our writing system represents not only the phonetics of words, but also morphology and etymology. This morphological and etymological information, if looked at as phonetic, seems irregular. But if looked at as what it is, it can not only be understood as *regular*, but can also increase our morphological and etymological knowledge of English.

English orthography is a rich system, but to understand its regularity we must go beyond phonetics into morphology and etymology. It is not coincidental that this information is included in dictionaries. Such information are important tools for understanding words and how to spell them.

The basics of these tools can be taught to even beginning students of English to help them understand and use the structure of English orthography.

Pedagogy of Spelling

Spelling in Language Arts

"New Way"

Smelt, 1972, proposes a "new way" to teach English in primary school based on the premise of phoneme-grapheme correspondence. Adapting from Chomsky & Halle, 1968, and Hanna, Hanna, Hodges, & Rudorf, 1966, Smelt presents an enormous number of phoneme-grapheme correspondence rules. She recommends these rules be used to revolutionize language arts instruction into a "new way" of teaching that presents English as a truly regular orthography. However, the rules are so numerous that such a revolution may be impractical. Still, this book could serve as a reference book to spelling rules. Published in Australia, it is printed in British English with no mention of American English spelling differences. Kesselman-Turkel, & Peterson, 1983; and Hanna, Hodges, & Hanna, 1971, are two similar books using American English.

Any "new method" should be viewed critically to see what its true value is. Valuable insights such as deeper understanding of our orthography can be pedagogically useful if adapted to suit classroom situations. But boldly adopting revolutionary "new methods" without critically examining their effectiveness in your teaching environment is a recipe for disappointment. The key is adapt, don't adopt.

Scott

Scott's 1994 article, *Spelling for Readers and Writers*, Reading Teacher, 48(2), 188-190., is a very practical introduction to elementary school spelling instruction. She begins with, "Spelling instruction needs to be more meaningful for students. We don't want children to think of spelling as word lists and tests, but as a tool to enable them to express themselves in writing," (p. 188) Her eight key ideas are:

1. The role of *reading* as the backbone of spelling instruction.

2. The role of simultaneously focusing on the visual (written) and aural (heard) manifestations in teaching the spellings of phonemes and of whole words *(phoneme-grapheme correspondence).*

3. Use *Games*, and *word play*.

4. Use *Visual recognition*.

5. *Meaningful writing* encourages spelling acquisition. "Students will learn how to spell and will learn the value of correct spelling, if they write often for authentic purposes." e.g.: "class newspapers or newsletters, published books, pen pal letters, thank you notes, invitations, displays in the hallway, and class books shared with others."

6. Encouragement of *risk taking*.

7. *Invented spelling* encourages *emergent spellers* to think about and attend to letters, sounds, and words, and develops awareness of *phoneme-grapheme correspondence*.

8. Nurture a *positive learner attitude toward spelling*.

Scott briefly describes the following 20 classroom spelling activities: * Teacher modeling * Morning message * Labels and signs * Wall charts * Pattern charts * Spelling big book * Journals * Conferences * Proofreading and

publishing * Have-a-go * Interesting words * Words within words * Word sorts * Word bank bulletin board * Word games * Personal dictionaries * Irregular spellings * Discovering the rules * Applying the known to the unknown.

Scott concludes with a warning that,

> In spite of the promise of new strategies in spelling instruction, some children will not learn spelling easily because they are not able to master visual features of words. (p. 190)

and cautions that poor spellers may feel unsuccessful and thus unmotivated to write if we overemphasize correct spelling.

Spelling is Developmental

Bolton & Snowball, 1993 [1985], describe five stages of children's spelling developmental, and provide appropriate classroom spelling activities for each level of development. Briefly, the **five stages of development** are (adapted form pp 22-52):

1. **Precommunicative** spelling stage: An attempt at writing is being made, but students' writing is not readable by others at this stage, though some letters may be recognized.

2. **Semiphonetic** spelling stage: Words are abbreviated down to one, two, or very few letters, but students begin to use simple letter-sound correspondence.

3. **Phonetic** spelling stage: Words are fully sounded out and written with more letters, using word segmentation and clear spatial orientation. However, letters are used ad hoc, without knowledge of the acceptable letter sequences of standard spelling.

4. **Transitional** spelling stage: This stage may last for several years as students begin going beyond purely phonetic strategies, towards the use of visual and morphemic strategies.

5. **Correct** spelling stage: Most words are spelled correctly. Students are thoroughly familiar with morphological structures such as root words and affixes. Sequencing constraints are know. Silent letters are knows. Uncommon spellings are known. Common words are spelled automatically, and incorrect spellings "look wrong" to the student's visual memory, while right spellings "look right".

Bolton & Snowball encourage **invented spelling** in the early stages of spelling development because it encourages the student to discover and use the *system* of English orthography in their writing:

> Children's invented spellings are the learners' attempts to find pattern and order in the spelling system. It is important that writers of all ages are afforded the same conditions for learning to spell as those offered to beginning writers. (p. 3)

So adult learners also need to "take risks" in applying their knowledge of the spelling system's patterns when attempting unknown spellings. Because without a willingness to look for, and use the patterns in our orthography, the task of spelling becomes a frustrating feat of rote memorization.

Continuing learning tactics which Bolton & Snowball recommend for students at the "Correct spelling" stage include (adapted from pp 41-52):

1. **Personal writing:** Daily writing, self editing with dictionary use.

2. **Sound/symbol relationships:** Identify words with a particular sound and classify them into patterns. Identify homophones.

3. **Dictionary skills:** Know how to locate base words (such as "deceive" for "deceiving"). Know how to read and generalize from the morphemic aspects provided (such as noun and verb endings, comparative versus superlative forms,

compound words, and verb tenses). Know how to read etymologies, and where to look up the abbreviations used in them.

4. **Modelling:** Read a lot, and with interest in the way words are spelled.

Classroom spelling activities Bolton & Snowball suggest for "correct spellers" are:

1. Word webs of root words and their derivatives.

2. Lists of words that came into English from other languages.

3. Make lists of words with the same spelling patten, and group them according to their sounds.

4. Play word games such as anagram, hangman, and others. Many other activities are provided for the earlier levels of elementary spelling development.

Phonics Versus Whole Word Approach

Horace Mann, a nineteenth century American teacher (1796-1859) advocated the "whole word approach," (look-say versus analytic) to reading, which he first observed in Prussia. (Balmuth, 1982, pp 187-193)

Mann uses the word *phonics* giving it the meaning it has retained, "the sound of the letters," (Balmuth, p. 191) but he argued for reading whole words as units, and viewed the drilling of individual letter to sound correspondence as misguided drudgery. (Balmuth, p. 190)

However, as Bolton & Snowball note, spelling is developmental. If language teachers are to help students develop into competent and confident spellers, the structure within words does need to be understood and taught. It is similar to teaching grammar. When grammar is abandoned by teachers, language teaching suffers. If grammar is overly emphasized, learning again suffers, and the profession steers away from grammar again.

This cycle seems to have been going on for centuries in language teaching. The reason is that language teaching is an art, not a science. The application of linguistic science such as grammar can instruct teaching, but it can not replace the art in language teaching. Indeed science and art opposite poles of knowledge which enrich each other, but fail if they try to replace each other.

Teacher Modeling

Browning's article, Helping Them Learn to Spell, Pen 1994 (& ERIC: ED 369 065), mentions the importance of "the teacher modeling her/himself as a writer first and a speller second." Six skills she models for her students are (adapted from p. 1):

1. **Spell high frequency words automatically**, don't really think about their spelling at all.
2. **Successfully attempt** most words that I have to write in English.
3. **Know how to check** spelling and know *when* to check it.
4. Generally I can choose the standard version of a word by **looking at alternative versions**.
5. **Acknowledge "demon" words** and look them up.
6. Know the **letter clusters, syllables, prefixes, and suffixes** characteristic of English.

Spelling in ESL

Grammar Versus Acquisition

Both have their place. English spelling instruction typifies the pedagogical dichotomy of structural grammar teaching versus communicative language input.

A balanced approach to teaching spelling as part of a whole language learning experience is best.

A critical understanding of how words are formed orthographically, the roles of individual letters and letter combinations phonetically, as well as the morphemic roles of roots and affixes can help students both remember the meaning of words and how to spell them.

Exposure to lots of print may automatically improve some' students' spelling (Krashen, 1993). For other students however, a more active involvement with the writing system may be necessary in order for them to be able to spell well and with confidence.

The reason reading alone may not be enough for some students is that the process of decoding words in reading is different from the process of synthesis involved in writing. Some readers may only know as much of a words orthography as context necessitates to deduce what word it is. Writers on the other hand, must actually produce each precise letter of a word in a correct quantity and sequence. For some students this can be a discouraging burden on memory if attempted without any understanding of the rules and patterns underlying the orthography. Spelling rules can be taken to extremes of abstract analysis well beyond practical classroom application. However, they should not be totally abandoned, but rather adapted to suit particular students' levels of understanding. Such understanding of lexical, morphological, orthographic, and phonetic component can put considerable logic and structure into the learning of correct spelling.

Keeping the semantic value of the orthography in mind, spelling can and should be taught as part of a communicative language experience. Mini pull out lessons on specific aspects of spelling can be useful. Long complex lessons into

abstruse linguistic structural analysis however are not likely to benefit students language acquisition.

Contrastive Analysis

Phonology. Students who's first language phonology lacks some of the phonic distinctions of English will have difficulty identifying those sounds. So it is difficult for them to use phoneme-grapheme correspondence rules to spell these sounds. For example, allophones in one language may be distinct phonemes in another language (e.g., /b/ and /v/ are allophones in Spanish, but phonemes in English).

The Great Vowel Shift rased the articulatory position of English vowels and threw them out of synchronization with the vowels of other Indo-European languages. Knowing this could help ESL students from those languages understand the apparent mismatch of vowel sounds to vowel letters, between their first language and English.

Script. Students who's first language uses the same Roman alphabet as English may experience some interference due to letters that stand for one phoneme in their first language and a different phoneme in English. Other students will be entirely new to the Roman alphabet and may find it awkward, if they come from syllabic systems like Japanese, or logographic system like Chinese.

TESL Literature on Spelling

Cronnell

Bruce Cronnell's section *Spelling English as a Second Language*, in Celce-Murcia & McIntosh (Eds.) 1979, Teaching English as a second or foreign language (pp. 202-214) gives more direct attention to spelling instruction in ESL than any other TESL source I found. Cronnell presents **How Should Spelling Be Taught** as follows:

> We can begin with ten general features of English spelling which can be valuable for students to learn.
>
> 1. That English spelling is systematic.
> 2. Which spellings are predictable (e.g., /ae/—*a*)
> 3. Which spellings are not predictable, but are common (e.g., /iy/—*ea, ee, e, ei, ie*).
> 4. How frequent unpredictable spellings are (e.g., in one syllable words, /iy/ is most frequently spelled *ea* or *ee*).
> 5. How to use a dictionary to find the spelling of words with unpredictable spellings. ...
> 6. How to spell useful, but irregularly spelled, words.
> 7. What bases and affixes are, and how to spell them individually.
> 8. How to combine bases and affixes.
> 9. How to use certain word-internal punctuation (e.g., apostrophes in contractions and possessives, capitalization of names, periods in abbreviations, hyphens in compounds).
> 10. What is possible and what is impossible in English spelling (e.g., words do not end in vowelcke, rather in vowelck, vowelke, or vowelk). (p. 205)

There is nothing specifically ESL about these ten points. Cronnell does however suggests that ESL students may have special **difficulty spelling by phoneme-grapheme correspondence** due to their limited exposure to *spoken*

English. Most EFL students, and many ESL students, will have had most of their exposure to English through reading, with limited exposure to the actual phonology of English.

Contrastive analysis, comparing the student's native language phonology with English phonology, may indicate English phonemes which they may have difficulty noticing and thus difficulty spelling by phoneme-grapheme correspondence. Also, if their native language uses the Roman **script,** there may be some letters which represent different phonemes in their native language than in English. Those letters may need extra attention.

The main points of Cronnell's chapter are,

1. ESL students' language background is a factor.
2. English spelling is a system of morphological and phonetic elements.
3. The dictionary is an important spelling resource.
4. Teachers may need to become experts in English spelling to provide systematic and accurate instruction.
5. Do not emphasize correct spelling so much that it hinders writing fluency.

Olshtain

Olshtain's section, *Functional Tasks for Mastering the Mechanics of Writing and Going Just Beyond*, in Celce-Murcia (Ed.) 1991, Teaching English as a second or foreign language (2nd ed., pp. 235-244), replaces the Cronnell section of the first edition. Olshtain presents spelling instruction at the beginning ESL level as part of a whole language approach:

> The stage devoted to the teaching of the mechanics of reading and writing aims at tree different goals: (a) to enhance letter recognition—especially when learners come from a different writing system, (b) to practice sound_spelling correspondences via

> all four language skills, and (c) to help the learner move from letters and words to meaningful sentences and larger units of discourse. (p. 238)

Along contrastive analysis lines he suggests,

> for students whose own alphabet is similar to that of English, we need to focus only on the differences. Yet for students coming from a completely different writing system, such as Arabic, Hebrew, Chinese, Japanese, or Korean, it will be necessary to work carefully on the recognition of every consonant letter. (p. 237)

While Olshtain briefly mentions that more advanced writing will need to "focus on accuracy and content at the morphological and discourse level," (p. 239) he does not further elaborate on spelling instruction at that level. He concludes that,

> the mechanics of writing are particularly important at the initial stage of the course since they help students establish a good basis in sound_spelling correspondences, which are important for effective use and the reading and writing skills and also for good pronunciation. (p. 241)

One of the criteria Olshtain includes in discussing ESL/EFL writing assignments is "to help students focus their attention on spelling rules they have learned and eventually on the need to use the dictionary for checking accuracy of spelling." (p. 240)

Robinett

In the Chapter *The Sound System*, in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: Substance and Technique, 1978, Robinett points out the need for a special phonetic-transcription alphabet in teaching pronunciation, and talks

about The Great Vowel Shift, and the complexity of phoneme-grapheme correspondence in English.

In her next chapter, *Acquiring Second Language Skills*, Robinett discusses "visual clues of spelling," in reading instruction:

> The use of "visual clues of spelling" [in reading] necessitates learning the letters of the alphabet and the spelling patterns that English uses to symbolize sounds and sound combinations as a preliminary step in the decoding process of reading. Although English is alphabetically symbolized . . . there is relatively poor "fit" between sound and graphic symbol. . . . Spelling clues in English are complex. (p. 184)

She considers spelling only briefly in discussing writing:

> The "visual clues of spelling" as utilized in writing signify the ability to spell, not just being able to interpret what has already been spelled for readers. As previously mentioned, this is no mean feat in English; and, although there are specific spelling patterns in English, native speakers of the language constantly refer to dictionaries, particularly for the spelling of unaccented portions of words. (p. 196)

Robinett has briefly described some of the complicating factors in English spelling, but has provided little guidance for spelling instruction.

Rivers & Temperley

Rivers & Temperley give less than halve a page, in A Practical Guide to the Teaching of English as a Second or Foreign Language, 1978, to spelling instruction:

> The teacher can focus the students' attention on spelling conventions by asking them to work out for themselves, from reading passages or dialogues they have studied, *probable rules of spelling* like the following:
>
> */s/* may be spelled c before *e, i,* or *y: certain, receive; city, recipe; bicycle, cylinder.*

/k/ may be spelled *c* before *a, o,* and *u; cat, came; come, college; cut, current.*

/k/ is usually spelled *ck* finally in monosyllables; *back, lock.* It may also be spelled *qu* as in *liquor*, or *que* as in antique. (p. 270)

They suggest this type of analysis could be set up as inductive learning small-group-activities, when particular spelling problems emerge in dictation or writing. However, the teacher should have a good knowledgeable of spelling rules beforehand.

TESOL Quarterly

The articles in TESOL Quarterly that mention spelling are mostly about pronunciation. However, due to the phonetic_alphabetic nature of our writing system, these articles on pronunciation shed some light on how spelling can help ESL learners. Ten such articles are reviewed below.

* Benson, 1989, **"Differences Between American English and British English: A Challenge to TESOL",** suggests that "[TESOL] Instruction should deal with the major orthographic, morphological, syntactic, collocational, and lexical differences between [British English and American English] standards." Benson points out, "the international press services like Reuters and International News Service diffuse American English and British English items worldwide." In order to avoid confusion to EFL students, teachers should be prepared to explain the differences between these two standards of World English.

* Zutell & Allen, 1988, **"The English Spelling Strategies of Spanish-Speaking Bilingual Children",** found the childrens' spelling attempts follow the same progression of developmental steps as native-English-speaking children.

* Tesdell, 1984, **"ESL Spelling Errors",** found that "spelling skills of ESL students of all language backgrounds need to be improved," (p. 333); and that "we have no evidence that spelling pedagogy should vary from language group to language group." (p. 334)

* Dickerson, 1985, **"The Invisible Y; A Case for Spelling in Pronunciation Learning",** presents rules governing the invisible /y/ in words like *community, ridiculous, continue, diffusion, puny*, as an example of how spelling cues are particularly important to ESL students who learn so much of their vocabulary from print. While this article is focused on improving students pronunciation, its exemplifies how knowledge of some of the more complicated relationships of phoneme-grapheme correspondence in English orthography may be particularly helpful to ESL students.

* Dickerson & Finney, 1978, **"Spelling in TESL: Stress Cues in Vowel Quality".** As in Dickerson, 1985, here Dickerson & Finney argue that,

> Spelling is a major pronunciation resource. If shown how to exploit it, [ESL/EFL] learners can increase their oral intelligibility and expand their active, speaking vocabulary. To incorporate such outcomes as pronunciation goals, teaching materials must introduce spelling patterns into the curriculum. (p. 163)

Explanation and sample lesson materials are presented for the teaching of the use of orthographic clues to identify stressed syllables, and determine vowel quality—"long" or "short" vowel sound.

* Dickerson, 1975, **"The Wh Question of Pronunciation: An Answer from Selling and Generative Phonology".** The "Wh" question here is *when* do you pronounce *what* sounds in *which* words. Dickerson points out that typical ESL pronunciation classes teach students the phonetics of *how* to pronounce the sounds in individual words lists, but not the systematic phonology of *when* to pronounce *what* sounds in *which* new words they may tackle as they increase their oral vocabularies on their own. Dickerson presents how at University of Illinois, advanced ESL pronunciation classes are taught using rules based on spelling and generative phonology to determine *when* to pronounce long, short, or lax (schwa) vowel sounds; and *which* syllable to stress, in words based solely on their spelling. Advanced ESL learners are thus given phonological rules to help them ad to their oral vocabularies words they have acquired from reading.

Teaching pronunciation through carefully analyzing spelling cues to pronunciation would build understanding of the substantial regularity and systematism in spelling, and thus help students understand the opposite but related skill of spelling by phoneme-grapheme correspondence and morphological clues.

* Fichtner, 1976, **"The Pronunciation of the English <NG>: A Case Study in Phoneme-Grapheme Relationships",** mentions briefly the factors such as affixes (i.e., telegraph, telegraphic, telegrapher) and word class (i.e., noun versus verb) in the phonetic realizations of (as Chomsky and Hall, 1968, hypothesize) the underlying abstract form of English words. He then studies in

detail the relationships between phonology, morphology, and the English digraph <ng>. Rules of relationship are intricately noted, and three concrete rules are presented for the pronunciation of <ng> in words such as *sing, singer, cringing, fungus, fungi, congratulate, and congregate.*

* Kreidler, 1972, **Teaching English Spelling and Pronunciation,** similarly suggests that students be taught rules of phoneme-grapheme correspondence. So they will be able to use spelling clues in pronouncing words correctly. Kreidler examines in detail the linguistic rules influencing the ways <ow>, <ti>, and <tu> are pronounced. Kreidler suggests students be introduced to these rules with grouping of contrasted examples, like these:

depart	departure
fact	factual
spirit	spiritual,

and these:

elect	election
promote	promotion
resident	residential

* Regarding dictionary use, Baxter, 1980, **"The Dictionary and Vocabulary Behavior; a Single Word or a Handful?",** recommends ESL students begin using an English only dictionary as soon at practicable. Baxter argues that the definitions in English only dictionaries serve not only as precise descriptions of words meanings and uses, but also as de-facto thesauri the reading of which broaden and fine tune students understanding of related words. Additionally, English only dictionaries tend to have more etymological

information, which is helpful for understanding both a words meaning and also its spelling.

* Monnot, 1974, **Pun and Games: Paronomasia in the ESL Classroom.** (paronomasia means word-play) Monnot suggests that playing with puns may be a good way to teach ESL students insights into lexical, syntactic, and phonological linguistic mechanism.

Conclusion

Linguistic Points

English orthography is systematic. Although the actual phoneme-grapheme correspondences in the orthography are complex, as Chomsky & Halle note our orthography may actually be an optimal system for representing the English language.

Although we write English with an alphabet, we are not only representing sounds, but also semantic morphemes.

English orthography involves many areas of language learning. Of the four language skills taught in ESL (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) perhaps only listening comprehension is learned without substantial reference to the orthography. Yet even listening comprehension (at phonologic and morphemic levels) might be aided by, and contribute to the understanding of spelling. The four language skills are all parts of one language, and thus are intimately intertwined and instruct each other.

Recommendations for ESL Spelling Instruction

Reading. In a reviews 25 studies, ranging from 1897 to 1990, of spelling accuracy in samples of student writing, Krashen, 1993, hypothesized, in line with his comprehensible input theory of language acquisition, that good spellers get that way from lots of reading. I.e., the more correctly spelled words they read, the more they will be able to spell. However, the 25 studies he reviews do not prove

or disprove that theory, which in any case is highly generalized. In general learners who are exposed to lots of language at comprehensible input level do acquire it. Reading lots of comprehensible print does seem beneficial.

An open question. Some learners, even with lots of reading experience, will have difficulty spelling. What should the ESL teacher do to help those students? This paper is not able to conclusively answer that question, but many ideas have been offered.

Orthographic structure. Much interesting information about the hidden linguistic structure of English orthography is available. For students who are having trouble spelling, some exposure to, and insight into the hidden language structures can both help them cope with spelling, and provide interesting insight into language.

Activities. Learning about root words, affixes, and how to read etymologies are beneficial spelling activities. But overly complex systems of spelling rules may be impractical teaching aids. There is a natural limit to how much explicit grammar instruction can be of value in language teaching. However, in student centered, meaningful quantities, grammar (and orthographic structure) is a useful teaching aid.

The authors reviewed above have many good ideas of how to incorporate the structure of orthography into language teaching. It is up to individual teachers and schools to assess which ideas will most benefit their particular ESL students.

Finally, **put spelling in its place.** Teach learners to confidently write first, and edit afterwards. Spelling should not be so heavily emphasized that it hinders students language acquisition, but they should be given the underlying knowledge, and confidence they need to achieve correct spelling.

Annotated Bibliography

Linguistics of Spelling

Balmuth, M. (1982). The roots of phonics. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

This is a very good book about the history of phonics in the English language. The role of phonics and spelling in language arts instruction is looked at historically and perceptively. The first five chapters offer interesting insight into written language: Chap. 1 Characteristics of Writing Systems; Chap. 2 Pictograms and Logograms; Chap. 3 Syllables; Chap. 4 Alphabets; Chap. 5 History of the English Alphabet. 28 chapters in all, including sections on Old English, Noah Webster, Phonics and so forth. The dedication suggests the books sincerity: *To seven-year-old Michael Quinones who, when asked, "And what is a teacher?", calmly answered, "A teacher is for beautiful."*

Hanna, P. R., Hodges, R. E., & Hanna, J. S. (1971). Spelling: Structure and strategies. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

This thorough book is divided into two sections: I. Theoretical Foundations of Spelling, and II. Strategies for a Spelling Program.

Daniels, P. T., & Bright, W. (Eds.). (1996). The World's Writing Systems. New York: Oxford University Press.

An encyclopedia of the world's writing systems, this book will be useful to ESL teachers who wish to know more about the orthographies of their students' first languages.

Pedagogy of Spelling

Bolton, F., & Snowball, D. (1993). Ideas for spelling. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

A book of good ideas for teaching spelling in primary grades. Includes a good brief introduction to the nature of English orthography (morphemic relationships; phoneme-grapheme relationships).

Cronnell, B. A. (1979). Spelling English as a second language. In M. Celce-Murcia & L. McIntosh (Eds.), Teaching English as a second or foreign language (pp. 202-214). Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.

Cronnell briefly discusses spelling instruction for ESL.

Olshtain, E. (1991). Functional tasks for mastering the mechanics of writing and going just beyond. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), Teaching English as a second or foreign language (2nd ed., pp. 235-244). Boston, Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle.

Olshtain's section replaces the section by Cronnell of the first edition. Spelling is discussed here for its important in the mechanics of writing. (But is not mentioned in the book's index!)

Krashen, S. (1993). How well do people spell? Reading Improvement, 30(1), 9-20.

Reviews studies that assessed spelling accuracy in writing. Reveals that first-year college students spell quite well, with 97.7% to 99.8% accuracy. Concludes that people reach such high levels of accuracy not through formal instruction or from writing, but most likely from reading.

Scott, J. E. (1994). Spelling for readers and writers. Reading Teacher, 48(2), 188-190.

Describes 20 instructional activities that can be used in the classroom to enhance students' knowledge of words and spelling within a context of reading and writing.

Webster, N. (1962) [1831]. Noah Webster's American spelling book: With an introductory essay by Henry Steele Commager. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.

This is of historical interest because of its contribution to the standardizing of American orthography, and the beginnings of spelling instruction. Popularly known as "The Blue-backed Speller," after many revisions and reprints it was second only to the Bible in ubiquity in American homes. It was first published in 1783 as the first part of A Grammatical Institute of the English Language. The copy referenced here is a 1962 facsimile edition, of an 1831 revision titled The American Spelling Book.

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